Journalists: Servants of the Truth

Shaka Ssali on the set of “Straight Talk Africa.” Photo courtesy VOA.

A guest blog post by Shaka Ssali.

I often say that information is the oxygen of democracy. When I left my country in 1976, I left behind a corrupt regime. Information was manipulated, human rights were abused, justice did not exist.

Fast forward a few decades later and I find myself in a position to ask tough questions of people who play a leading role in shaping the future of the African continent. But I also open the microphone to concerned African citizens who also want to ask questions and get answers that affect their lives directly.

What I have learned is that the most important reason one will respect you as a journalist is because of your integrity. Your integrity is based on your credibility. Your credibility comes from your truthfulness. All these come from you submitting yourself as a servant of the truth, a servant of issues.

What I’ve learned during my career is that we “the people” can bring about change. Don’t be afraid to push the limits, to ask probing questions, even in instances where you may not be welcomed. You don’t have to be a journalist, you don’t have to be a member of the press. Remember, above all, you are a citizen.

Your generation has more tools of inquiry available to question the status quo. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan coined the famous phrase “the medium is the message.” This is more true now than ever before. Digital technologies and social media have broken the barriers of access to information. You can check facts and find other points of views. You can mobilize large groups of people toward pursuing certain goals. The term “citizen journalist” belongs to your generation. Change comes when the people press for change.

Shaka Ssali is a Ugandan-born American journalist who has worked for the Voice of America for 23 years. He is the managing editor of Voice of America’s English to Africa service and the host of “Straight Talk Africa.” On his show, Shaka and his guests discuss topics of interest to Africans and the African diaspora including politics, good governance, rule of law, economic development, press freedom, health, social issues and conflict resolution.

YALI Network Members Learn About

Leadership in Exclusive #YALICHAT

To celebrate the launch of the new online courses, select YALI Network members were invited to participate in a private Facebook Q&A with Sadhana Hall, a YALI Network online course instructor and leadership expert.

From April 28 to 30, more than 20 YALI Network members had the opportunity to engage directly with Hall, posing questions on everything from networking to management. The following are some questions from the YALI Network participants and Hall's responses.

Question: Can you identify a team leader, manager or mentor who has been the most helpful to you in a positive way and what made them so?

Hall: People who were humble, self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses, did not compete for ideas and were not afraid to talk to me about my weaknesses! They knew how fragile egos can be and were very diplomatic and, at the same time, clear and specific about how I could improve.

Question: How can I be a great leader?

Hall: Great leaders know their strengths and weaknesses, examine values that are meaningful to them, and how these values are congruent or not congruent with their behavior. Good leaders are never afraid to say they are sorry. […] I like this saying of Warren Bennis (noted scholar in leadership): "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right thing." Leaders must develop their own ways of doing thing right and must have a very clear understanding of the ethical considerations that guide them to take actions.

Comment: How can I improve my pitching skills, especially introducing my ideas to other people?

Hall: Small ideas executed very well and intentionally [are] ones that rapidly demonstrate their value. […] They speak for themselves and they speak for you and about you. Most importantly, these are a combination of people's ideas and, because you are a leader, you share the triumph with those that helped build the idea in the first place. And very soon, your vision becomes their vision and their vision becomes yours!

Question: How do you successfully network with a high-profile person?

Hall: Do research about them. Think about what in their background and their experience inspires you and how that connects to your own interests. Think about the questions you could ask them. Then, when you say hello, introduce yourself. … Ask them the questions [or] ask how you could contact them.

Question: What exactly can we realistically expect from the people in our network?

Hall: Networking is about building relationships around common interests. You should be as ready

to help as you should be ready to receive help.

Question: How have you dealt with difficult situations with managers or team leaders?

Hall: Whenever I have had to have a difficult conversation, I have first tried to think about answers to these questions: How do I view the problem? How does the person or people view the problem? What would be the outcomes if we pursued one person's or the other people's approach? Where is the compromise and what would I be able to live with, understanding that I will not be fully happy with the outcome? Why is the person or people upset and what can I do to make life easier for them?

I look for patterns: I can see where I could be creating or adding to the problem, I can see where they are creating or adding to the problem. I am able to see solutions without being emotional. I practice the conversation with someone I can trust. Finally, I am ready to talk to the person or people.

I go into the conversation with the objective of seeking first to understand and then be understood. I ask clarifying questions. If I feel I am becoming emotional — flushed face, defensive language — I immediately withdraw myself from the conversation or take a break, and then start the conversation when I have gathered myself.

I have found that, using this approach, the person or people with whom this difficult conversation needs to take place feel respected, and we have often been able to come up with a compromise and even a clarification of thoughts that have created a misunderstanding.

When you are a manager, people look up to you to create a safe situation for them. You don't have a choice in the matter.

Question: When, according to you, [can] an entrepreneur leave his job to dedicate himself entirely to his own project?

Hall: Leaving a job for an emerging company … is a personal choice. [It] depends on whether you feel like taking the risk of leaving a secure job, how much you would be earning, how much your skills are used, how fulfilled you feel, how many people rely on you financially, whether the emerging company has a stable product and a market that has the potential for expanding even more, where you feel most happy and productive, where you like the people working with and around you.

Then I would weigh the pros and cons and see how you feel. I have done this once or twice in my life and it led me to quit course [or] change jobs. … Change is always scary but it becomes easier if you reflect on your values.

Read Hall's guest blog "Leadership: A Personal Reflection on Key Concepts."

Ethics and Law

A free press has the capacity to influence others. In a democracy it has the right to report information without government approval. Many countries provide legal protections to journalists so they can exercise that right. In a free society, the most basic responsibility of a free press is to report the news accurately and fairly — that is, to practice ethical journalism.

Ethics is a system of principles that guides action. While the law establishes what you can and cannot do in given situations, ethics tells you what you should do based on personal, professional, social and moral values.

Ethics and Law *is the fourth in a series on media development. Simply click on the titles below, in blue, to expand a section and learn more.*

Ethical Principles

Journalists face ethical dilemmas every day under pressure from owners, competitors, advertisers and the public. They need to resolve these dilemmas, so the journalism they produce is ethical.

These are the basic principles of the U.S. Society of Professional Journalists:

• Seek truth and report it. Be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

• Minimize harm. Treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

• Act independently. Be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

• Be accountable to readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Making an ethical decision means choosing not between right and wrong, but between right and right.

Ethical Decisionmaking

First, define the dilemma. What values could be compromised? Then, collect more information to help you make a good decision. Consult newsroom policies and guidelines and talk to colleagues, supervisors and even people not directly involved in a story but who know the circumstances.

Some newsrooms deal with ethical quandaries from the top down. When an issue arises, a senior manager decides what to do. This approach is quick, but can be arbitrary. For that reason, many newsrooms have an inclusive ethical decisionmaking process.

By explaining what was done and why, journalists bolster their credibility and justify the public's trust in them.

Ethics Codes

Journalism associations around the world have codes of ethics to guide the work of members. Codes cover everything from plagiarism to privacy, corrections and confidentiality.

Most also cover these things:

• Fundamental values, including respect for life and human solidarity.

• Fundamental prohibitions, including not lying, causing needless harm or appropriating someone else's property.

• Principles of accuracy, fairness and independence.

Where journalists are required to belong to a union or association, ethics codes might have an enforcement provision.

Codes of Conduct

Codes of conduct spell out activities that are encouraged or prohibited or require the approval of a manager. The main reason for these limitations is to protect the credibility of news organizations.

Community Standards

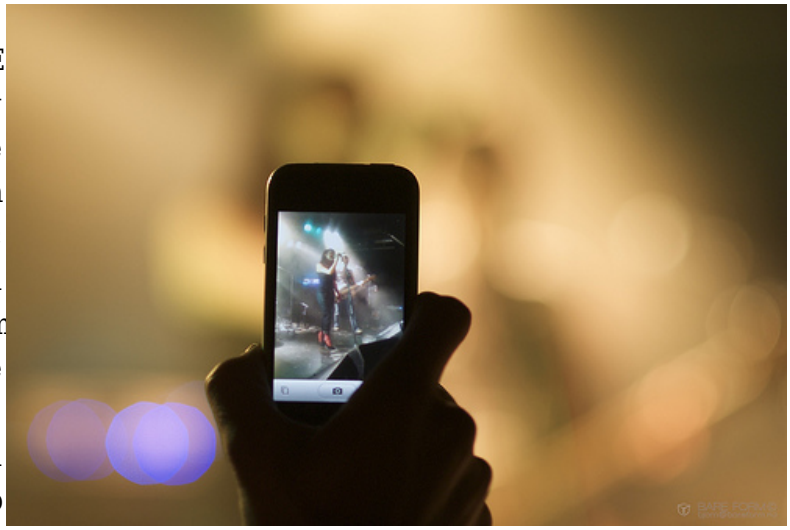
News organizations often face conflicts between newsworthiness and community standards. Editors choose different solutions to situations, depending on what they feel readers can tolerate.

Some choose to explain why they made the decision they did in the text of the story or in an "editor's note."

Other parts in this series include What is News?, Getting the Story, Telling the Story, and Taking Good Photographs.

(Adapted from an article by Deborah Potter published in the Handbook of Independent Journalism. Potter is executive director of NewsLab, an online resource for journalists in Washington. Download the complete Handbook of Independent Journalism *[PDF 834kB].)*

Taking Good Photographs



Even camera phones can produce compelling images. (bareform/flickr)

We have heard it before. “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Today, more than ever, photographs have the power to inspire, upset or tell complete stories. To make sure your photographs are as compelling as possible, follow these tips from National Geographic.

Avoid direct sunlight. Your subjects will be cooler, happier and more attractively lit if they don’t have a sunbeam hitting them in the face. If it’s an overcast day, you’re in luck. This is one of the best outdoor lighting situations for photographing people. If it’s a sunny day, have your subjects stand in the brightest patch of shade you can find.

Wait for the “magic hour.” During sunrises and sunsets, the sky is colorful enough for even a camera phone to capture land and sky with fairly good exposure.

Stabilize your camera phone. In low light, camera phones slow the shutter speed to let in more light and have a longer opportunity to capture movement. Hold the camera phone with both hands and brace your upper arms against your body when you shoot.

Apply the rule of thirds. When composing a picture, imagine two horizontal lines and two vertical lines crossing like a grid on top of it. Place strong lines and divisions like the horizon on the grid lines and let elements of interest fall on the intersections.

Use simple backgrounds. When the background of your picture is cluttered and the lighting is questionable, fill the frame of your camera phone by moving in closer to your subject.

Get the right tone. Shooting in black and white can help develop your photographer’s eye by letting you concentrate on the relationship between light and shadow without the distraction of color.

Try different angles. When photographing adults, experiment with both the angle of your composition and the angle of light to see what’s most flattering.

Want more photography tips? Read National Geographic’s full list.

This is the fifth in a series on media development. Other parts in this series include What is

News?, *Getting the Story*, *Telling the Story* *and* *Ethics and Law*.

Telling the Story

News stories are made up of facts, observations and quotes. Reporters use their news judgment to decide what is most important to include in a story and in what order to put information.

They focus on these things:

• What is the news?
• What is the story?
• What is the image?
• How can I tell the story?

Telling the Story *is the third in a series on media development. Simply click on the titles below, in blue, to expand a section and learn more.*

Writing

Reporters decide on a focus for the story before sitting down to write. Then they organize the story, listing the facts and deciding what should be at the top, end and middle of the story. They select the best quotes or sound bites from an interview and decide where they should go.

Good news writing is concise, clear and accurate. Generally, news stories have shorter sentences and paragraphs than other types of writing. Each paragraph contains one main idea. A new paragraph begins when a new idea, character or setting is introduced.

Journalists use simple, direct language that is easy to understand, with more nouns and verbs than adjectives and adverbs.

Because they write stories for a general audience, journalists try to avoid jargon or terms unfamiliar to most people.

A principle of news writing is to show the audience what happened rather than telling them about it.

Accuracy is critically important: grammar, spelling, punctuation, dates, addresses, numbers and other details that go into a news story.

Quotes and Sound Bites

News stories are told primarily in the reporter's words. They include the words of other people in

quotations or sound bites. Quotes make stories stronger by sharing the direct experience of someone involved. A quote high in a story can make it more interesting. Quotes are at least one sentence long.

The best quotes add insight and perspective to stories. They use colorful language and reflect on personal experience or expert knowledge.

Once you've chosen the best quotes, build your story around them.

Attribution

Attribution identifies the source of the information reported. One reason to attribute information is to allow readers and listeners the opportunity to decide whether to believe it. Another reason is to place responsibility for a controversial statement where it belongs, with the person who said it.

Structure

A story has a structure in the same way that people have a spine. But not all stories should be structured in the same way.

In the inverted pyramid, information following the lead develops the point made in the lead.

A modified inverted pyramid is the "hourglass." It begins with the most important information. After a few paragraphs it becomes a narrative, usually told in chronological order.

Another form is the "diamond." It begins with an anecdote, introducing a character whose experience illustrates what the story is about. The story then broadens to show its wider significance. Toward the end, the reporter returns to the character's story to conclude the narrative.

Leads

The lead begins the news story. It is meant to capture attention. A hard lead summarizes the essential facts of the story. A soft lead may set the scene or introduce a character. It may be anecdotal, illustrating or foreshadowing the larger story.

Endings

Have an ending in mind when you begin writing. Endings often echo beginnings — they return to an important place or a person. A story may end with a sound bite or strong quote when it is so powerful that anything more would be a letdown.

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(Adapted from an article by Deborah Potter published in the Handbook of Independent Journalism. Potter is executive director of NewsLab, an online resource for journalists in Washington. Download the complete Handbook of Independent Journalism *[PDF 834kB].)*

Getting the Story

Reporting involves collecting facts and checking them carefully for accuracy. Journalists sometimes witness stories. More typically, they learn details from others who experienced something or are experts on the topic. They then corroborate information by talking to additional sources and by checking public records, reports or archives.

Getting the Story *is the second in a series on media development. Simply click on the titles below, in blue, to expand a section and learn more.*

The 'Five W's and an H'

The information a journalist collects should answer questions commonly known as the five W's and an H: who, what, where, when, why and how.

Who

• Who is involved in this story?
• Who is affected by it?
• Who is the best person to tell the story?
• Who is missing from this story?
• Who is in conflict in this story?
• Who else should I talk to about this?

What

• What happened?
• What is the point of this story?
• What does the reader, viewer or listener need to know to understand this story?
• What is the most important fact?
• What is the history of the story, and what happens next?

Where

• Where did this happen?
• Where should I go to get the full story?
• Where is this story going next?

When

• When did this happen?
• When did the turning point occur in this story?
• When should I report this story?

Why

• Why is this happening?
• Why are people behaving the way they are?
• Why should anyone watch, read or listen to the story?

How

• How did this happen?
• How will things be different because of what happened?
• How will this story help the reader, listener or viewer?
• How did I get this information?

Observation and Research

Journalists want to witness events so they can describe them accurately. To record what they observe, reporters need a notebook and pencil or pen. Many carry audio recorders, cameras or mobile phones to record events.

Journalists must be skilled note-takers.

• Write down facts and thoughts. Make clear where a piece of information came from.

• Draw diagrams of rooms, scenes or items in relationship to each other.

• Get spellings of names and proper nouns. Ask for birthdates.

• Spell out interview ground rules.

• Annotate the notes as soon as possible. Spell out abbreviations and mark important information, quotes and anything requiring follow-up.

Sources

Reporters use both primary and secondary sources. A primary source is someone with direct experience of an event or a related document. Secondary sources confirm information obtained from primary sources.

Interviews

Good questions reward with rich information. The best questions are open-ended and cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.

With public officials, start with the premise that the public has a right to know what officials are doing. Experienced reporters can persuade reluctant officials to agree to an interview.

Many journalists begin with an “icebreaker” question that lets the source relax and helps the journalist establish credentials with the source.

Ground Rules

Most interviews are “on the record,” meaning the reporter can use anything said and attribute it directly to the person speaking.

The reporter and source must agree in advance if there are different ground rules for using information provided during an interview. “Embargoed,” for example, means information may not be used until a specific time. “On background” or “not for attribution” means that a reporter can use the information if the source is not identified (sometimes sources will permit being described in a general way). “On deep background” means the information can be used, but not in a direct quote, and the source cannot be identified in any way. “Off the record” means the information cannot be used at all in a story or even repeated to another source; it is given only to provide the reporter with context.

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Share A Story

This May, you have a new way to share important stories: a YALI Network newspaper. Maybe there’s a YALI Network event happening near you or you know a YALI Network member who is doing incredible things in your community. The YALI Network newspaper is your opportunity to tell us – in your own words – how other YALI Network members are making a difference. Look at the individuals around you like a journalist would, find a story that needs to be told, and write a short news article about it.

We are looking for 200 – 400 word pieces that reflect the expert advice from this series on the media. Scroll down to see what the submission process requires. Think about the story you want to tell. Write it. Then come back and share it with the Network. You have until **Sunday, May 24** to submit your story about another YALI Network member.

Use this expert advice to help you tell your story:

What is News?
Getting the Story
Telling the Story
Taking Good Photographs
Ethics and Law

Have questions? Tweet to @YALINetwork

Your editors are ready to answer any questions you might have about this project!

Tweets by @YALINetwork

What Is News?

A free press is often called the oxygen of democracy. That's because one cannot survive without the other. Democracies — established or emerging — depend on the consent of an informed citizenry. And to keep these citizens informed, journalists must provide information that is fair, accurate and independent from outside influence.

What Is News? *is the first in a series on media development. Simply click on the titles below, in blue, to expand a section and learn more.*

What is News?

News is what is new — what's happening. What makes a story newsworthy depends on these things:

Timeliness: Did something happen recently?

Impact: Are many people affected? Does your audience have an emotional response to the story?

Proximity: Did something happen close to home or involve people from home?

Controversy: Do people disagree about this? Does the store involve conflict, tension or public debate?

Prominence: Is a well-known person involved?

Currency: Are people talking about this?

Oddity: Is what happened unusual?

Intended audience: Who is reading or listening to the story? Different groups of people have different concerns, which make them interested in different types of news.

Need to know: Do people need to know about this to go about their daily lives?

Types of News

Hard news: This is what is on the front page of the newspaper, at the top of a Web page or at the start of a news broadcast. It may be politics, war, business, crime or a natural disaster. It is timely,

controversial and has a wide impact. Hard news stories place the most important information first.

Soft news or feature: This is a human-interest story involving a prominent person or someone with an unusual story. It covers lifestyles, the arts, entertainment, sports, food, health and education. Features often begin with an anecdote to draw the audience's interest.

Where News Comes From

• Unplanned, naturally occurring events, like disasters and accidents.

• Planned activities, like government and business meetings and news conferences listed in what is called a "daybook." Staged events, such as demonstrations. Journalists must be wary of organizers who want to tell only their side of the story.

• Press releases.

• Documents, data and public records.

• Reporters' enterprise — Journalists find stories by looking around and listening to what people are talking about. Ask the people you meet what is going on in their lives or their neighborhoods. Ask what has happened since the last time a story was in the paper or on the air. Follow-ups often lead to more newsworthy stories than the original report.

Other parts in this series include Getting the Story, Telling the Story, Ethics and Law *and* Taking Good Photographs.

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The Many Benefits of Community-Based Conservation

Cattle bunching promotes healthier pastures and attracts grazing wildlife. (USAID/Riccardo Gangale)

In 1990, Namibia became the first African nation to incorporate environmental protections into its constitution.

Before Namibia's 1990 independence, tourism was controlled by a private minority group. Locals received little benefit from tourism, and few had incentives to conserve. Namibia's wildlife populations plummeted as poaching and droughts increased.

Then Namibia's government made another bold move. With the help of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), it shifted the rights and responsibilities of managing wildlife and land onto local communities.

Known as Living in a Finite Environment, or LIFE, this project brought together the Namibian government, USAID, the World Wildlife Fund and several local partners. Together, they provided conservancies with technical support, training, grants and regional coordination.

To become a conservancy, communities had to define their borders and membership, establish a governing committee, develop a benefit distribution plan and adopt a legal constitution. In return, they earned the rights to hunt animals for their own use, manage protected game and permit trophy hunting within a quota.

Today, nearly one in four rural Namibians belongs to a registered conservancy. Wildlife is a valued asset. Poaching is no longer acceptable, and many native species have thrived.

LIFE has become a model. In 2004, USAID helped launched a similar project in Kenya called the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), an organization that includes pastoralists, landowners and the Kenyan government. Both projects illustrate the benefits of community-based conservation.

Thriving wildlife

Conservancy members know the more wildlife they have, the more tourists they can attract. Elephant sightings in Kenya's Sera Conservancy, for example, increased 366 percent after NRT's establishment.

What's more, less than a third of elephant deaths on NRT's conservancy lands are caused by poaching — a stark contrast to the 87 percent caused by poaching outside the conservancies. That's partly because poaching is seen as taking away from the community, and locals are more likely to report poachers.

Healthier lands

Many conservancies have instituted new land management practices. One such practice, cattle bunching, lumps herds of cattle in one place for grazing instead of allowing them to spread out. This helps break up the hard soil while giving the unused land time to heal. Once the cattle have eaten through one patch, herders move them onto another, allowing the first patch time to recover.

These improved grazing practices have resulted in fatter cattle and higher incomes. By 2012, conservancy pastoralists had sold $1.17 million of cattle.

More jobs

Conservancies can partner with private companies to open safari lodges, sell trophy hunting licenses to professional hunters and make handicrafts such as jewelry.

In Namibia, LIFE has created 547 full-time and 3,250 part-time jobs. In Kenya, women from NRT conservancies sold $85,000 worth of jewelry in 2011 alone. In fact, NRT conservancies earn more than $1 million every year from tourism, livestock and jewelry.

Greater development

Any money the conservancies make is shared among the members. Many conservancies use this money to compensate pastoralists who've lost livestock, to subsidize education for its members and to start new projects like growing cash crops.

In most conservancies, about 60 percent of gross income is put toward development projects such as increasing access to water or improving road infrastructure.

Better governance

For USAID, the process matters as much as the product. It's not just about conserving wildlife or creating jobs. By encouraging inclusive decisionmaking, LIFE and NRT are cultivating good governance.

Through community-based conservancies, locals are learning how to hold their representatives accountable — and how to replace them when necessary. Meanwhile, representatives are learning how to manage resources and funds on behalf of their members.

To Develop Ecotourism, Protect Wildlife

Faye Ndiaga explores Senegal's ecosystems by canoe. (Courtesy of Faye Ndiaga)

From his canoe, Faye Ndiaga surveys the mammals, birds, reptiles and flora living along Senegal's mangrove-dotted river banks. He wants to ensure the fragile ecosystem is around for future generations to enjoy.

"I don't want to wait for an animal species to be endangered to bring protection," he says. "Some animal species like the rhinoceros are endangered and the struggle to protect them is hard because we did not try to do that earlier," says the 29-year-old YALI Network member who hopes to work in Senegal's tourism industry or with a nonprofit devoted to wildlife and environmental protection.

Senegal stretches from the semiarid Sahel savanna in the north to tropical forest with in the south. It spans wooded hills in the southeast to mangrove-lined estuaries on the Atlantic. The country's wildlife includes terns, lions, elephants, giraffes, hippopotamus, manatees, turtles and gazelles. It hosts a variety of coastal birds and wetland and grassland waterfowl. Reptiles range from snakes, lizards and crocodile species.

A lowland waterway in Senegal. (@ AP Images)

Ndiaga thinks his nation is ideal for a diverse industry devoted to hosting guests that appreciate its cultural and environmental resources. Already a tourist destination for many Europeans, Senegal has the potential to attract even more visitors from the United States and Asia and to create “green” jobs, he believes.

> *“My goal is to polish the image of Senegal,” Ndiaga says, adding that “if we want to develop ecotourism, we must protect the wildlife.”*

Faye Ndiaga, right, and a friend examine a beached sea turtle. (Courtesy of Faye Ndiaga)

The environmentalist says that by raising public awareness of the need to protect endangered species, Senegal can avoid harmful practices like the unnecessary hunting of migratory birds. He stresses that protecting natural resources is the responsibility of all nations. “Protect animals before they are endangered,” Ndiaga implores.

Ndiaga’s dream for a responsibly-developed ecotourism industry in Senegal has support. He notes that Senegal’s government acts to protect the environment in several ways. It “encourages its citizens to work more to protect the environment,” protects its parks and wildlife reserves through a national forest agency, and provides safe refuge to endangered species imported from other countries, he says.